

# Running the Race

*by Bryan Gibson*

Hebrews 12:1-17 is our text, where the life of a Christian is compared to a race. Let's see what points we can glean from this text about this race.

This race is no sprint; it's a marathon, and so endurance is absolutely essential. "Lest you become weary and discouraged" (v. 3)—that's what concerns the Lord, and that's why He gives the following admonitions: "Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us" (v. 1). "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees" (v. 12, ESV).

We won't endure, if we try to run with the weight of sin. "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us" (v. 1). Pursuing holiness (v. 14)—that's what this race is about and we can't do that and hold on to sin at the same time. And we can't lay aside sin if we don't clear from our path any stumbling blocks—anything that might lead us into sin, anything that might injure our souls. "Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed" (v. 13).

It always helps to have a crowd behind you, and we most certainly do. Those in the "stands" include people like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Isaac, and all the other men and women of faith discussed in Hebrews 11. These are the people He's talking about when He says we're "surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses" (v. 1). They know what it's like to do right when no one else is even trying (Noah); what it's like to have the pleasure of sin tugging at you (Moses); what it's like to be asked to do something when you don't really understand why (Abraham); what it's like to believe in a promise that almost seems too incredible to believe (Abraham and Sarah); etc. And they're all saying the same thing—"You can do it, too!"

As much encouragement as these "fans" may offer, our biggest source of encouragement is our Savior, Jesus Christ. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls" (vv. 2-3). He's the reason we started the race, and He's the reason we'll finish it. He's waiting for us at the finish line, sitting at the right hand of God, and if we endure, we'll get to sit with Him (Revelation 3:21).

The "hostility from sinners" (v. 3), the suffering we endure for righteousness' sake (vv. 4-11)—it's all part of the training regimen, and it will make us stronger, because it gives us opportunity after opportunity to exercise our faith. "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (v. 11, ESV).

The prize for this race—it's eternal, so let's make sure we don't give it up for something that's not. Esau sold his birthright for one morsel of food (v. 16)—a far more tragic mistake would

be to sell our souls for something that doesn't last. Make that mistake, and we'll have eternity to regret it.